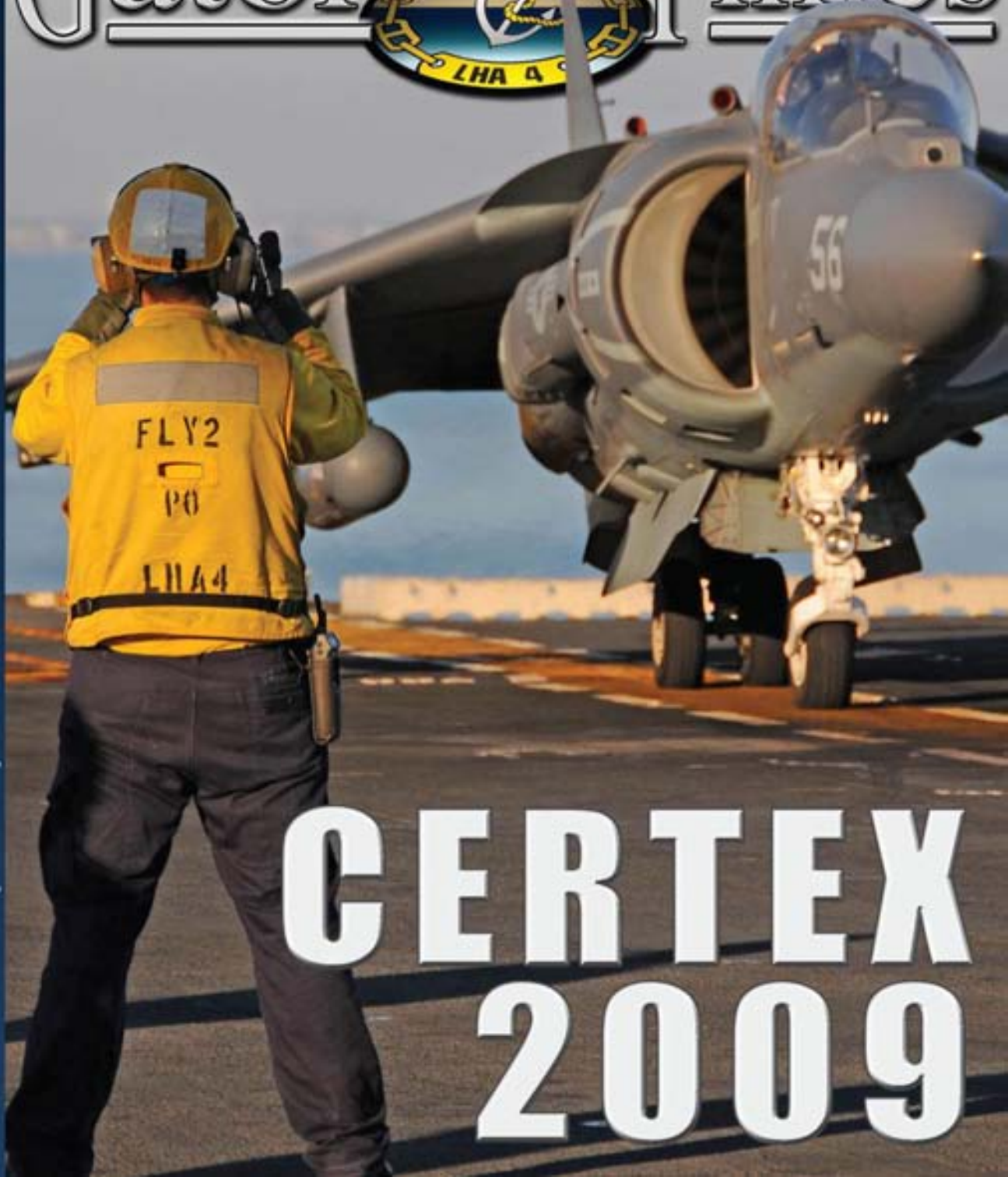


Gator Times



USS NASSAU (LHA 4) THE NAVY'S "TOP GATOR"



CERTEX 2009

Gator Times

30 years
LHA 4

Contents

GatorTimes

Commanding Officer
Capt. Ronald Reis

Executive Officer
Capt. Samuel Norton

Command Master Chief
CMDCM(AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak

Administration Officer
Lt. Samantha Savage

Visual Information Division Officer
Ensign Apphia Maxima

Public Affairs Officer
MC2(SW/AW) Chris Hoffpauir

Editor / Design & Layout
MC2(SW) Michael Cortez

Staff
MC1 James Stillpoc
MCSN(AW) Jonathan Pankau
MCSN Chris Williamson

Amphibious Ready Group

Public Affairs Officer
Lt. Ellen Bock

Staff
MC1(SW/AW) Brian Aho
MC2 Coleman Thompson
MCSN Desiree Green

GatorTimes is a product of the USS Nassau (LHA-4) Public Affairs Office. The editorial content of this newsletter does not necessarily reflect the official views of the command or any government agency, and does not imply endorsement.

FEATURES

3 NASARG's wraps CERTEX

4 Unscripted Mass Casualty Drill Valuable Training

5-6 CERTEX 2009

7 Plane Captains

8 Bingo!

9 Nassau Talent Show Raises Morale

10 BMRs are Key to Unlocking Chevrons

DEPARTMENTS

2 Captain's Call
CMC Corner

11 Command Achievements



On The Cover:
An AV-8B Harrier II jet powers up its engines before taking off from the flight deck of USS Nassau (LHA-4).
Photo by MC2 Coleman Thompson



Greetings shipmates and thank you for reading the December edition of the Gator Times Captain's Call.

I'm proud to say we just completed CERTEX with flying colors. Our inspections went well and the integration of our Navy/Marine Corps team is at an all time high.

I know that the Nassau / 24 MEU team is more than ready and positioned for a very successful deployment. We performed excellent during work ups, and I'm very confident we'll continue to perform above and beyond expectations. We are more than prepared to perform the missions that will come at us.

Next on the agenda is some well deserved rest and relaxation over the holidays. Take this opportunity during POM to recharge your batteries and to spend time with your friends and families.

Remember to stay safe. No matter where you go or how you get there, make a plan and follow through. Whether it's driving safety, electrical safety or kitchen safety, make sure you are careful and make sure you make it back safe and sound.

After POM we start final preparations for the deployment in mid January. Now's your final chance to get your finances in order and be ready to spend seven months aboard this fine capital warship doing what we do; Taking it to the enemy.

Captain's Call



Capt. Ronald Reis
Commanding Officer
USS Nassau (LHA-4)

Happy Holidays and stay safe.

Until next time Top Gator, remember to motivate yourself and those around you!

CMC Corner

CMDCM (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak



Nassau Family and Friends,

It's hard to believe December is already half over and a new year is only days away. 2009 has been an extremely busy for Nassau and our Sailors, it was a year marked with many challenges and most importantly successes; successes we can all be proud of. Their enthusiasm and professionalism has proven that Team Nassau is up to any challenge Big Navy sets before us.

December also means the holidays are upon us and that most of us will be enjoying some well deserved relaxation time with our families. Relaxation is key for all of us, but I ask that each of you take some time and reflect on what you need to prepare for our upcoming January deployment.

What do you need to accomplish to get your personal and family affairs in order prior to deployment? Think about Wills, Powers of Attorney, family medical / dental needs, ID Cards, vehicle maintenance, uniforms, civilian clothing and any other personal needs you may have.

As we begin our holiday celebrations please keep safety in

mind at home and especially if you are traveling. Many of you will be traveling out of the area to visit family and friends. I ask that you pay close attention to the weather on your travel days; it can change rapidly this time of year. If you know inclement weather is coming during your travel days, leave early if possible. Please do not traveling in bad weather and jeopardize your or you family's safety. If you are traveling over 500 miles, don't stretch your limits - split your trip into two days. Remember, being exhausted behind the wheel is as dangerous as driving while intoxicated.

In closing, I'd like thank all our families and friends for your endless support and heartfelt prayers throughout the year. My wife Kirsten and I would like to wish each of you the best of the holidays, and a blessed New Year. I look forward to the challenges of 2010 and continuing to work with the best Sailors on the waterfront!

Until next time, take care and God Bless.

NASARG's wraps CERTEX

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

The Nassau Amphibious Ready Group (NASARG) returned Friday from a successful Certification Exercise (CERTEX), their final exercise prior to deploying next year. CERTEX is the culminating exercise of the 24 Marine Expeditionary Unit's (24 MEU) extensive pre-deployment training program. The Marines of 24 MEU are now designated Special Operations Capable (SOC) and certified to carry out its 23 mission-essential tasks, ranging from amphibious raids to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. Capt. John Bruening, Commander, Amphibious Squadron Eight (CPR-8), said now that CERTEX is completed, NASARG is ready to get underway next year and complete their mission overseas.

"A key component of our ability to achieve this level of readiness is the cooperation between the Navy and the Marine Corps team," Bruening said. "Both groups have come together during the course of our work-up period, putting together an effective working relationship that will enable us to accomplish any mission during deployment." Although the SOC moniker applies only to the MEU, the achievement would not be possible

without the coordinated efforts of the Nassau Amphibious Ready Group. Lt. Cmdr. John Erickson, CPR-8's training officer, said CERTEX is designed to certify 24 MEU for the upcoming deployment. The Sailor and Marine teamwork built upon during the exercise refines the skills and plans developed during the work-up cycle.

"This relationship between the Navy and the Marines is now a well-oiled machine that is ready to execute any task that may be encountered on deployment," Erickson said. NASARG is currently composed of the amphibious assault ship USS Nassau (LHA 4), amphibious transport dock USS Mesa Verde, dock landing ship USS Ashland, and a Marine Landing Force from the 24 MEU. The group composition adds to the combat proven Amphibious Ready Group and Marine Expeditionary Unit capabilities with increased defenses, strike, power projection, and a range of unique combined capabilities. These capabilities give the combatant commander a wide variety of options and enables sustained independent operations in dynamic environments.



Sailors on the flight deck of USS Nassau (LHA 4) watch as an MV-22B Osprey from Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 162 prepares to take off during a training exercise.
Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson

Unscripted Mass Casualty Drill Valuable Training

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau's (LHA 4) Medical Department, Fleet Surgical Team 4 (FST 4) and Navy Hospital Corpsman from 24 Marine Expeditionary Unit conducted a mass casualty drill Tuesday.

Mass casualty drills prepare medical personnel for a large influx of wounded personnel and keep the ship's medical department working efficiently with the Marines and FST 4.

"Coordination between the Marines and the Fleet Surgical Team is vital to our mission," Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class (SW) Laketa Thomas said. "Deployment is around the corner and these drills prepare us for the stressful situations we will have to deal with."

Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Benjamin Wyatt added that the mass casualty was planned as a scripted event, but that changed as the drill grew closer.

"Unscripted training is beneficial to us because nothing ever goes as planned when dealing with any medical emergency situation," Wyatt said. "Staying flexible makes things run a little bit smoother."

Wyatt feels that medical drills should be dynamic evolutions because actual emergency situations are so unpredictable.

"One of the surprises was that the patients did not have identification on them," said Thomas. "Normally during a planned training evolution, they always have their ID card on them. This time we had to question the patients to figure out who they were."

Thomas and Wyatt both agreed that the mass casualty drill was highly successful and were confident that the ship's medical team will have no problem working together with FST 4 and the Marines.

"This mass casualty drill was one of the best I've seen in my career," said Lt. Cmdr. Brian Norwood, Nassau's senior medical officer. "We were well prepared and the patient flow was at a pace we could handle. I'm excited to work with everyone involved on deployment and hope to conduct more drills like these in the future."



Lt. Cmdr. Chris Crerar and HM2 Edgar Tucker, members of Fleet Surgical Team 4, work on a portable ventilator that assists with patient breathing during a mass casualty drill.
Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau



CERTEX
2009



Plane captains

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Navy and Marine Corps plane captains play a vital role aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4), inspecting and maintaining the ship's helicopters and planes.

Aviation Structural Mechanic 3rd Class (AW) Thomas Hall is a plane captain for Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron 28 (HSC-28) Dragon Whales. The Dragon Whales fly MH-60S Knight-hawks and Hall is responsible for maintaining the helicopters upkeep.

"Plane captains are basically in charge of the helicopter until it leaves the flight deck," said Hall. "We do everything from turn around inspections every 24 hours prior to flight to phase inspections." Hall added that phase inspections involve taking the helicopter apart piece by piece and conducting a thorough search for damage and wear.

The Vertical Takeoff Marine Medium Tilt Rotor Squadron 162 (VMM-162) Golden Eagles (REIN), Nassau's Marine Air Combat Element (ACE), supplies plane captains for their CH-53E Super Stallions, MV-22B Ospreys, and AV-8B Harriers. Each type of aircraft has a plane captain division assigned to them.

"As a collateral duty inspector I am responsible for inspecting the other plane captains maintenance checks and signing off on them," said Cpl. Jesse Marks, an Osprey plane captain. "Quality assurance is a big deal with plane captains and we have to

make sure that even the smallest maintenance responsibility is perfectly executed."

If a piece of equipment that is necessary for the safe operation of the aircraft is found defective then the collateral duty quality assurance representative takes over.

"I basically hold the pilots life in my hands," said Cpl. Miles Landry, the Osprey quality assurance representative. "If a flight critical part is not fixed, the aircraft is in grave danger of crashing." Landry went on to say that his job is especially difficult with the Ospreys because they are an electronically controlled aircraft.

"A wealth of electronics knowledge as well as mechanical knowledge is required to be a plane captain," Landry said.

Underway plane captains work 12 hours shifts and conduct maintenance early in the morning to make sure the aircraft can support the next day's tasks.

"We have to wait until flight quarters is over to do our maintenance," said Marks. "Unlike maintenance on shore, we do not always have the space we need to do our required inspections until after flight ops."

Marks and Landry both agreed that as operations begin to ramp up, the plane captains step their efforts up to make sure the pilots make it back home safely.



Cpl. Orvan LeBlanc, a crew chief for the CH-53E Super Stallion plane captain division of the VMM-162 Golden Eagles (REIN), inspects the Super Stallion's tilt rotor during flight quarters.
Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

Bingo!

By MC2(SW) Michael Cortez
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Big Bucks Bingo is a favorite USS Nassau (LHA-4) tradition, an event set up by Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) for the crew to relax and win some prizes.

December's Big Bucks Bingo was different than the ones in the past, offering big prizes instead of a share of the card sales. Information System Technician (SW/AW) Patrick Magee, president of the First Class Petty Officers Association (FCPOA), said "We wanted to give out big prizes like the 40-inch television and X-Box to take the place of what we might have given at the annual Christmas party. We can always count on the party to be a big morale booster for the crew." Magee went on to say that since Nassau's schedule conflicts with timing and planning, the FCPOA needed an alternative for the crew's enjoyment.

Command Master Chief CMDCM (AW/SW) Stan Kopiczak agreed, saying "We had to do something big for the crew to

help ease the tension of knowing we were deploying soon. Bingo is always great for morale and we made sure it was bigger than ever."

Prizes also included three MP3 players. The biggest prize given away was a 40-inch HD television, along with \$250. Aviation Structural Mechanic Airman Joshua Jones was the night's big winner.

"It was my first time playing bingo. I feel real lucky and fortunate to have won such a big prize," said Jones. "I plan on using the cash for Christmas gifts, and maybe bring the television on deployment so my whole department can benefit from it."

Magee said, "The FCPOA and MWR pulled off a big night of bingo, and it's only going to get bigger."

While there will be big cash prizes all through deployment as usual, Magee said something else will be added to the mix. The FCPOA is planning with a local auto dealer to give away a new car. If all goes well, the winner will have a brand new red sports car waiting for them on the pier when Nassau returns from deployment.



AMAN Joshua Jones from AIMD Department stands with his prize.
Photo by MC2(SW) Michael Cortez

Nassau Talent Show Raises Morale

By MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau
USS Nassau Public Affairs

USS Nassau's (LHA 4) First Class Petty Officer/Staff Sergeant Association hosted a talent show in the ship's hangar bay Sunday.

Sailors and Marines turned out to watch service members sing, dance, read poetry, and play the piano.

"Nassau needed the talent show," said Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW) Reva Stout. "Watching everyone go out and do their thing and release some stress was a huge morale booster." Stout participated in the talent show with a few of her shipmates forming a group called the H1N1 dancers, in celebration of the vaccination shots they received that day. She went on to say that these types of events bring the First Class Petty Officer/Staff Sergeant Association closer together.

Chief Information Systems Technician (SW) Shaquana Fernandez, who won first place in the competition with her rendition of the Alicia Keys' song "If I Ain't Got You", said she could tell the crowd was getting into everyone's performance. "The talent show was a great place for me to break the ice

with the crew and let everyone know who I am in a positive way," Fernandez said. "My voice is my passion and my passion is my voice and it's been that way since I was 3 years old."

During her performance, Fernandez played to the crowd, singling out Staff Sgt. Sharrod Burns and singing to him.

"I had a great time," Burns said. "When Chief came up to me and started singing to me, it blew my mind. Her voice is absolutely outstanding and performances like that make it so I can't wait until the next talent show."

Information Systems Technician 1st Class (SW/AW) Patrick Magee, the president of the First Class Petty Officer/Staff Sergeant Association, said there will definitely be more talent shows to come.

"The energy during the talent show is obvious," Magee said. "The crew really enjoys watching their shipmates perform and I will definitely be planning more events like these for deployment."



ITC (SW) Shaquana Fernandez sings Alicia Keys' song "If I Ain't Got You" to Staff Sgt. Sharrod Burns. Photo by MCSN(SW) Jonathan Pankau

BMRs are Key to Unlocking Chevrons

By MCSN Chris Williamson
USS Nassau Public Affairs

Sailors aboard USS Nassau (LHA 4) anxiously wait to take advancement exams in March 2010. However, they'll need to have met all the requirements for the exam, one of which is the recently reinstated Basic Military Requirements (BMRs).

"Junior Sailors are going to have to start studying now," said Senior Chief Navy Counselor (SW/AW) Harold Gibbs, Nassau's command career counselor. "If they haven't already, they'll only be hurting themselves. Even though the Navy's requirements for promotion are time in rate, command recommendation, and making sure they follow the correct path of advancement, there's also Nassau's policy of having the Sailor complete the necessary BMRs."

For example, those looking to take the 3rd Class or 2nd Class exam must finish the Petty Officer 3rd & 2nd Class BMR before they're allowed to take the exam. Sailors taking the 1st Class exam must complete the Petty Officer 1st Class BMR.

Aviation Electrician's Mate 3rd Class (AW) Alexandra Wong said that even though the BMR might help some Sailors, it's too broad and has so much content that it would make it incredibly hard to pinpoint what test takers should know.

"The BMRs have the all basic requirements that Sailors need to know," said Gibbs. "There are 21 requirements and 17 chapters included in the BMR book. Chapters include public appearance, military conduct, naval organization, communications, diplomatic characterization and customs/courtesy."

While the Navy continues to provide advancement opportunities to Sailors, only the best and brightest will be getting frocked.

"Think harder, not stronger," said Gibbs. "If you don't study your bibliographies, you're guaranteed to miss quite a few questions," said Gibbs. "BMRs are a part of every bibliography, and each exam contains a specified amount of basic military questions."

All exams have two different sets of questions: professional military knowledge (PMK), which is taken from the BMRs, and in rate (IR) questions. The higher the pay rate, the more PMK questions there are, but fewer IR questions. For example, the 3rd Class exam contains 35 PMK and 165 IR questions, where as the 2nd Class exam has 50 PMK and 150 IR questions. Not to be outdone, the 1st Class exam has 65 PMK and 135 IR questions.

"The command makes the decision whether or not BMRs are required for advancement," said Gibbs. "Some commands are recently enforcing the BMR due to exam scores being below average. I believe that the BMRs should help Sailors in the long run with their exam and their military career in general."

Even though BMRs provide basic military information for Sailors, there are still mixed feelings about requiring them for the exams.

"I disagree with having to study them," said Wong. "It should be the Sailor's choice and responsibility to further their own career or not."

For more information on BMRs, contact NCCS (SW/AW) Gibbs online at the Navy Advancement, Navy Knowledge Center or the Naval Education Training Command website.



Capt. Ronald Reis, commanding officer of USS Nassau (LHA 4), receives a salute from a Sailor during a frocking ceremony in the hangar bay. Photo by MCSN Chris Williamson